The WFOT global survey of mental health practice in occupational therapy

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Introduction: One of the grand challenges in global mental health is to ‘strengthen the mental-health component in the training of all health-care personnel’ (Collins et al 2011). There are increasing numbers of occupational therapy education programmes worldwide but little intelligence about their mental-health component.

Objectives: To identify if there are any unmet educational needs for occupational therapists working in mental health.

Method: An international survey was conducted using the web-based tool SurveyMonkey. Occupational therapists currently in practice were asked about their education and occupational therapy interventions. An ability to read and understand English and access to the internet were required to respond to the survey. Ethical approval was secured.

Results: There were 3183 respondents from 82 countries, representing all WFOT’s regional groups and 0.091% of the estimated 350,000 occupational therapists worldwide (WFOT 2011). The majority of respondents (74%; n=2249) indicated that they were occupational therapy practitioners; of these 57% (n=1808) were mental health practitioners. A Bachelors level occupational therapy qualification was held by 60% (n=2963). The education strategies surveyed (based on an extensive literature review) were experienced in pre-qualifying education programmes by at least 50% of respondents. Respondents indicated which interventions they had used in the past or currently to provide therapy; response rates varied considerably and a number of items were skipped. A cross-regional analysis will be presented to illustrate similarities and differences between the WFOT regional groups.

Conclusion: Education in occupational therapy appears to be more innovative and broad-based than occupational therapy practice in mental health. The findings contribute to the practice of occupational therapy by assisting WFOT to better position globally the occupational therapy profession as an essential contributor to mental health services.